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ABSTRACT

Acceptance or rejection of school policy hinges on the role played by formal and informal groups within the community power structure. Kimbrough's research suggests that formal groups are subordinate to the informal power structure in establishing policy, though formal groups make important contributions to decision-making. Some researchers support the view that important policy decisions are made by a few people in the informal power structure. Other scholars argue that the power is not monopolized by a small group but is diffused among many competing groups. This paper accepts both views; however, only one type of power structure can exist in a community at a given time. In the monolithic power situation, the informal power structure holds a complete monopoly of power. Where power is diffused among competing groups, the decision-making process seems to be much more complex; action will probably not occur until a policy has been widely considered by a number of subsystems within the community. The task of the school administrator is to identify the power structure in his community and to respond accordingly as the decision-making process progresses from one stage to another. (Author/JG)

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THE USE OF THE POWER STRUCTURE IN THE ATTAINMENT OF EDUCATIONAL GOALS

-by-

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The local community determines in large part the nature of the school. Its mores and customs dictate the attitude of students toward teachers, of teachers toward students, of administrators toward teachers, and, ultimately, the atmosphere of the entire school. The local community can withhold funds or can be very generous. It determines the extent to which controversial issues can be discussed in the classroom. Although it does this through its duly constituted authority, the board of education, there is always present, though not verbally, the power of the community. It is the manner in which this power of the community can be harnessed for the effective attainment of educational goals that this paper shall be concerned.

Very little attention of contemporary research has been directed toward the problem of the proper motivation of the power structure. (2:107) Perhaps there are two main reasons for this. First, most contemporary researchers have their hands full just simply locating and defining the power structure within a given community. Second, even if a model of a power structure is formulated it cannot possibly apply to another community because no two are alike. Therefore, no specific answer can be found which can be applied to all situations with satisfactory results. Only a generalized formula can be presented which may enable school administrators to constructively use the power

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structure of their community.

THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

In a democratic society the decision-making process in education is exposed to economic, political, and social forces which can either advance, retard, or utterly defeat any issue that is vital to the health of a school system or any public institution for that matter. Many school administrators mistakedly feel that they must have the majority support of the community before a policy can be successfully instituted. This is only superficial reasoning of the uninitiated. Studies on community power since World War II have shown repeatedly that there is a lack of wide-spread participation by community citizens in educational affairs. Much of the influence on community decisions pertaining to educational issues comes from interest groups who are only a minor segment of the general population. If interest groups have such an impact on the decision-making process in education they must be identified and the nature of their influence defined.

For the purposes of this paper both the findings of scholars who used the reputational technique to support a unified power structure and those who rejected it in favor of a competitive pluralistic world of corporate citizens contesting for power will be assumed to be correct. In other words, it will be hypothesized that some communities are characterized by a true monolithic power structure, while other communities are characterized by the diffusion of power among competing interest groups. With this in mind the entire decision-making process

shall be traced through six stages placing emphasis on the stages in which the power structure makes its greatest impact felt.

The six-stage process of decision-making as suggested by Robert E. Agger shall be used as a framework for demonstrating the interaction of the power structure with the administrative process of public schools. These six stages are:

(1) policy formulation,
(2) policy deliberation,
(3) organization of policy support,
(4) authoritative consideration,
(5) policy promulgation,
(6) policy effectuation. (1:86)

In the policy formulation stage there is a convergence of interest in that two or more people have reached some agreement upon need for action. This stage grows out of the basic economic and political pressures in the community that require either immediate or future action.

The second stage, policy deliberation, occurs when the various issues and alternatives are discussed. The possible choices are derived and succintly stated. This can also be called the legitimation stage because at this point the policy is legitimized by key people or key groups in the system.

Once the policy is "written down" or formulated the third stage, organization of policy support, is initiated in order that individuals, small groups, or interested agencies may bring their maximum influence to bear. Sound public relations procedures are a must at this point. The goal is to develop consensus rather than conflict. Since the policy at this point is diffused throughout the relevant subsystems in the com-

munity, this can be called the diffusion stage.

Stage four, authoritative consideration, takes place when either by public balloting or by small groups deciding by formal or informal methods the issue is approved. Once the decisional outcome has sufficient support, the official promulgation is made.

Usually, at stage five, official promulgation, an official public statement will be released if the policy involves a major modification of current policy or practice. If the decision does not alter current procedures the official promulgation need not be so obvious.

Finally, the administrator must take the policy as it exists on paper, organize and mobilize his resources and then launch and execute the action the policy dictates. This is stage six, policy effectuation.

THE ROLE OF FORMAL AND INFORMAL GROUPS IN DECISION-MAKING

The acceptance or rejection of school policy hinges upon the roles played by the formal and informal groups within the power structure of the community. Research as presented by Kimbrough thoroughly supports the contention that of these two factions, the informal groups wield the power. (2:29) The formal groups were seen as subordinate to the informal power structure in establishing policy yet made important contributions to decision-making.

There are at least six vital roles that organized interest groups play in the process of decision-making. Cahill formulated this list:

(1) Interest groups serve as important centers of interaction between influentials.
(2) Organizations provide an important public forum for getting reactions to projects and for obtaining public support for proposals.
(3) Emerging leaders obtain valuable training in community service through leadership in organizations.
(4) Solidary organizations often exert much power for a special institutional sector of the community.
(5) Organizations help maintain the separate identity of special interest groups.
(6) A popular concept holds that citizens express themselves most effectively through organized interest groups and that they are in turn influenced by the organization. (1:107)

The formal interest groups, even though they play an important role in the decision-making process, are only tools in the hands of the informal structure of power-wielders which can be considered the "policy-makers elite." (2:30) According to Hunter, once the informal power structure makes its decision on policy, the formal groups are used to execute the policies. In addition, he sees the formal groups as providing a channel by which the men of power can communicate both upward and downward through the structure of power. (2:32)

In the monolithic power situation the informal power structure holds a complete monopoly of power. This monopoly on power is so great that strangely enough the informal elite can many times defeat an educational proposal simply by doing nothing. By remaining aloof from an issue a power vacuum is created. Since the main power structure is uninvolved, this leaves the door wide open for the lesser powers. Almost invariably a number of groups with differing intents and purposes converge on the scene spelling doom for the measure since

many of them usually oppose it. Such a power vacuum can easily be created because of a lack of resourceful planning on the part of the administrators who failed to mobilize and motivate the actual power sources of their school district. (2:168-169)

Thus, the decision to act or not to act is made by a few people in the informal power structure. If the decision is made to act, a highly disciplined understructure is called into play to implement the decisions by winning support of the appropriate associations and groups throughout the community. This is the consensus of the "reputational researchers."

On the other side of the coin are the scholars that reject these conclusions regarding the structure of power. They reject the reputational technique of locating power figures. To them the power is in no way monopolized by a small group of men but is diffused among competing groups. This is a competitive power situation which is pluralistic in the sense that several groups attempt to gain a general power advantage.

As mentioned previously, this paper shall accept both views as being valid situations that occur in modern day communities. It must be kept in mind that only one type of power structure can exist in a community at a given time.

Since educational goals must be attained within the confines of these differing power structures, a thorough knowledge of the decision-making process in each is absolutely necessary for success. Certainly, it would appear that the methods for obtaining the successful acceptance

of a policy in a community with a monolithic power structure should vary greatly from those that would be used in a community with a competitive pluralistic structure. The differing methods shall now be examined using Agger's six-stage process of decision-making as a framework.

THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS IN COMMUNITIES WITH A MONOLITHIC POWER STRUCTURE

In this more highly structured power situation, the initiation of the policy (formulation stage) may come from either within or from outside the top power group. Irregardless, once initiation has occurred, the top power group can then decide whether or not the idea deserves further study. If the decision is made to study the idea further, this may be done informally or it may be a formal investigation conducted by a committee. The policy then receives legitimation only if there is a high degree of consensus among the power holders (policy deliberation stage). Once the policy has been approved and accepted by the power group their full power is at that time placed behind the proposals.

Once this occurs, the policy and the need for action is then diffused throughout the necessary subsystems of the community (organization of policy support stage). To many of the less well-informed members of the community this stage may be perceived as the actual birth of the policy while in actuality it may have already been several days, weeks, or even months since formulation. While these groups or formal associations are going through the forms of policy formulation and deliberation, the policy is receiving some publicity. Once this "rubber-stamp" approval is obtained, an effort is made to win acceptance

of the need for action throughout the entire community as in the case of an election (authoritative consideration stage). Once approved, an official public statement of the policy will be released (official promulgation stage) and then the proper action is launched as the policy dictates (the policy effectuation stage).

Beginning with the organization of the policy support stage and continuing to the end of the process, the leadership is exercised primarily by lower-level leaders in large communities. In smaller communities, the top figures are usually more directly involved in leadership in the formal sense.

THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS IN COMMUNITIES WITH A COMPETITIVE PLURALISTIC POWER STRUCTURE

In communities where power is diffused among competing groups, the community decision-making process seems to be much more complex than in those with the monolithic structure. Here it appears necessary for the proposed policy to be discussed and accepted within several groups before any agreement is likely to occur at the community level. Usually, to bring about linkage among power groups at this point, it is necessary to have an "aroused populous" or citizenry.

Thus, rather than the proposal being discussed and accepted quietly and informally by a few power figures, community action will most probably not occur until after the policy has been widely considered by a number of subsystems within the community. Apparently, the decision-making process must move through the first three stages within several subsystems before the linkage between the subsystems required

will allow entrance into the fourth stage, authoritative consideration. At this stage, the community can function as a single system at the ballot box. However, if linkage or mutual agreement is not reached before the issue is placed before the general public, there appears the danger of such a conflict over the details of the proposal that favorable community action might be precluded.

It should now be evident that each community has a unique power structure. However, each power structure can be classified as either monolithic or pluralistic. The task of the school administrator becomes one of being able to identify the power structure in his community with its subsystems, and, very importantly, being able to recognize and respond accordingly as the decision-making process progresses from one stage to another.

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